

Using Court Records for Genealogical and Historical Research, 12 September 21226
Missouri State Archives-St. Louis

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SLIDE 1: Introduction

SLIDE 2: Overview of institution

- Our collection: case files and record books for St. Louis Circuit and subsidiary courts, 1804-1875
- Handout pages 3-4

SLIDE 3: What are the courts?

- Function and history
- The St. Louis court system – handout page 5
- All other Missouri counties have a Circuit Court, but not with all the lower courts St. Louis had

SLIDE 4: Circuit Court vs. County Court

- Circuit Court: judicial
- County Court: administrative

SLIDE 5: Probate Court and Naturalizations

- Probate 1802-1900: in County Court up to 1841, then separate Probate Court
- Naturalizations 1815-1911: recorded in books for each court

SLIDE 6: Courts and Community

- Crossroads of activity
- Institutional anchor and chronicler of their jurisdiction and the people in it

SLIDE 7: Why are court records important?

- Legal history, relationships
- LARGE collection of records

SLIDE 8: Why would someone be involved with the courts?

SLIDE 9: Relationships and stories

- Beyond institutional and legal history, they tell us stories and they tell us about relationships; they tell us about people who were involved with the court, what they did, and what they had

SLIDES 10-15: Documents contained in the case files

SLIDE 16: Legal terms and legal language in general

- Statutory, meaning it follows the language of the statute that is relevant to the case
- Therefore, the language of one debt case or one divorce case will be the same as any other except for the details that make any one case unique
- Look for what makes the case unique

SLIDE 17: Accessing and using the records

SLIDE 18: Where are they?

- St. Louis, Jefferson City, online, Civil Courthouse after 1875
- Availability – handout page 6

SLIDE 19: Searching the collection

- In-house electronic indexes, index books
- Online resources
 - Judicial Records: <https://s1.sos.mo.gov/Records/Archives/ArchivesMVC/JudicialRecords/>
 - County and Municipal Records: <https://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/ArchivesMVC/countyrecords/>

SLIDE 20: How we index the collection

- What we do and do not capture
- In-house subject series – handout pages 7-8

SLIDE 21: Using the records you've found

- Document order, name spellings, law dictionary, legal language, historical context, record books
- READ EVERYTHING

SLIDE 22: Complementary sources

- Newspapers, city directories, maps, probate records, General Laws of Missouri, Missouri Revised Statutes, marriage records, diaries, historical articles and books, MSA online resources, etc.
- MSA online resources: <https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/resources>

SLIDE 23: Some case file examples

- The following cases are from the same period.
- The look, language and organization of files from other periods will look different, but the information content will be the same

SLIDES 24-26: Divorce

SLIDES 27-31: Debt

SLIDES 32-34: Partition

SLIDE 35: Value-added projects

- Project: divorce cases
- Project: letterhead accounts

SLIDE 36: VOLUNTEERS

- If interested, contact me at 314-588-1746, bill.glankler@sos.mo.gov

MISSOURI STATE ARCHIVES – ST. LOUIS

Some content available in the online Judicial Records Database:

<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/Records/Archives/ArchivesMVC/JudicialRecords/>

The Missouri State Archives – St. Louis holds the St. Louis County Circuit Court records from 1804-1875, prior to the 1876 St. Louis City/County split. These case files contain petitions, pleas, responses of defendants, summons, subpoenas, calls for witnesses or jurors, testimony, depositions, judgments, verdicts, and a variety of exhibits supporting the pleas of the plaintiffs or defendants. Case files often contain inventories of personal or commercial property, wills, accounts of money owed or paid for goods or services, maps, plats, surveys, or similar items illuminating the matter under dispute in the courts. Many of the cases do not include the verdict, judgment, or final resolution of the case. This information can be found in the corresponding indexed record books for the various courts.

The records document the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural history of St. Louis, the State of Missouri, and the United States of America. They provide insight into early territorial expansion, the fur trade, Native Americans, the institution of slavery, local and national debt relationships, and they place St. Louis and Missouri in the context of broader national historical trends and events.

RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Circuit Court, 1804-1875*

The St. Louis County Circuit Court was created in 1815 having civil, criminal, probate, and chancery jurisdiction until 1821. Probate jurisdiction passed to the County Court from 1820 until the creation of the Probate Court in 1841. The Missouri General Assembly abolished the chancery/equity distinctions in 1849.

Extent: 385 cubic feet processed records (1804-1868), 218 cubic feet unprocessed records (1869-1875), 138 record books, indexes, and dockets

RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Criminal Court, 1839-1893; Court of Criminal Corrections, 1866-1881*

Established in 1839, the Criminal Court had jurisdiction over criminal cases.

Established in 1866, the Court of Criminal Corrections had jurisdiction over all misdemeanors under the laws of the state of Missouri. The Court of Criminal Corrections was abolished in 1881.

Extent: 362 reels of microfilm (paper files destroyed after imaging), 75 record books and indexes

RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Court of Common Pleas, 1841-1865*

Established in 1841, the Court of Common Pleas was established to hear and determine all civil cases at law or in equity. The Court of Common Pleas was abolished as of January 1866.

Extent: 107 cubic feet unprocessed records, 17 cubic feet executions/fee bills, 50 record books, indexes and dockets

RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Law Commissioner's Court, 1851-1865*

Established in 1851, the Law Commissioner's Court had jurisdiction in all actions in which debt and damages were less than \$150 (this amount was revised to \$500 in 1864). The Law Commissioner's Court was abolished as of January 1866.

Extent: 52 cubic feet processed case files (1857-1865), 17 cubic feet unprocessed case files (1851-1856), 3 cubic feet executions/fee bills, 10 record books and indexes

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RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Land Court, 1853-1865*

Established in 1853, the Land Court had jurisdiction in all actions founded upon a claim to the title or possession of land within the county of Saint Louis and all actions on mechanic's liens for more than \$150. The Land Court was abolished as of January 1866.

Extent: 35 cubic feet unprocessed records, 14 record books and indexes

RECORD GROUP: *Mechanic's Liens, 1824-1875*

Builders, contractors, laborers, and material suppliers could file a claim on the building or property for any unpaid balance. The lien specified who owned the property charged with the claim, included a detailed account of the work performed or material provided, and provided a description of the property to be charged with the lien.

Extent: 20 cubic feet processed records, 8 record books and indexes

RECORD GROUP: *St. Louis County Probate Court, 1804-1891*

The first Probate Court was established in 1804. Probate jurisdiction passed to the Court of Common Pleas from 1813-1815, then to the Circuit Court from 1815-1820, then to the County Court from 1821-1840. A separate Probate Court was established in 1841 and remains in existence today.

Extent: 253 reels of microfilm (paper files held by City of St. Louis Circuit Court)

RECORD GROUP: *Naturalization Records, 1816-1906*

Congress passed the first naturalization law in 1790. From that time through the early 20th century, immigrants could file naturalization papers in any court of record. In Missouri these courts included county courts, circuit courts, chancery courts, probate courts, criminal courts and common pleas courts. The two-part filing process did not have to take place in the same court. After living in the United States for two years, an immigrant could file the original "first papers," or declaration of intent (this requirement ended in 1952). After another three years of residence, the immigrant could file the petition for naturalization, or "second, or final papers". All Europeans residing in the Louisiana Territory (Missouri) at the time of the 1803 Purchase were automatically granted United States citizenship rights and privileges.

Extent: 144 naturalization books

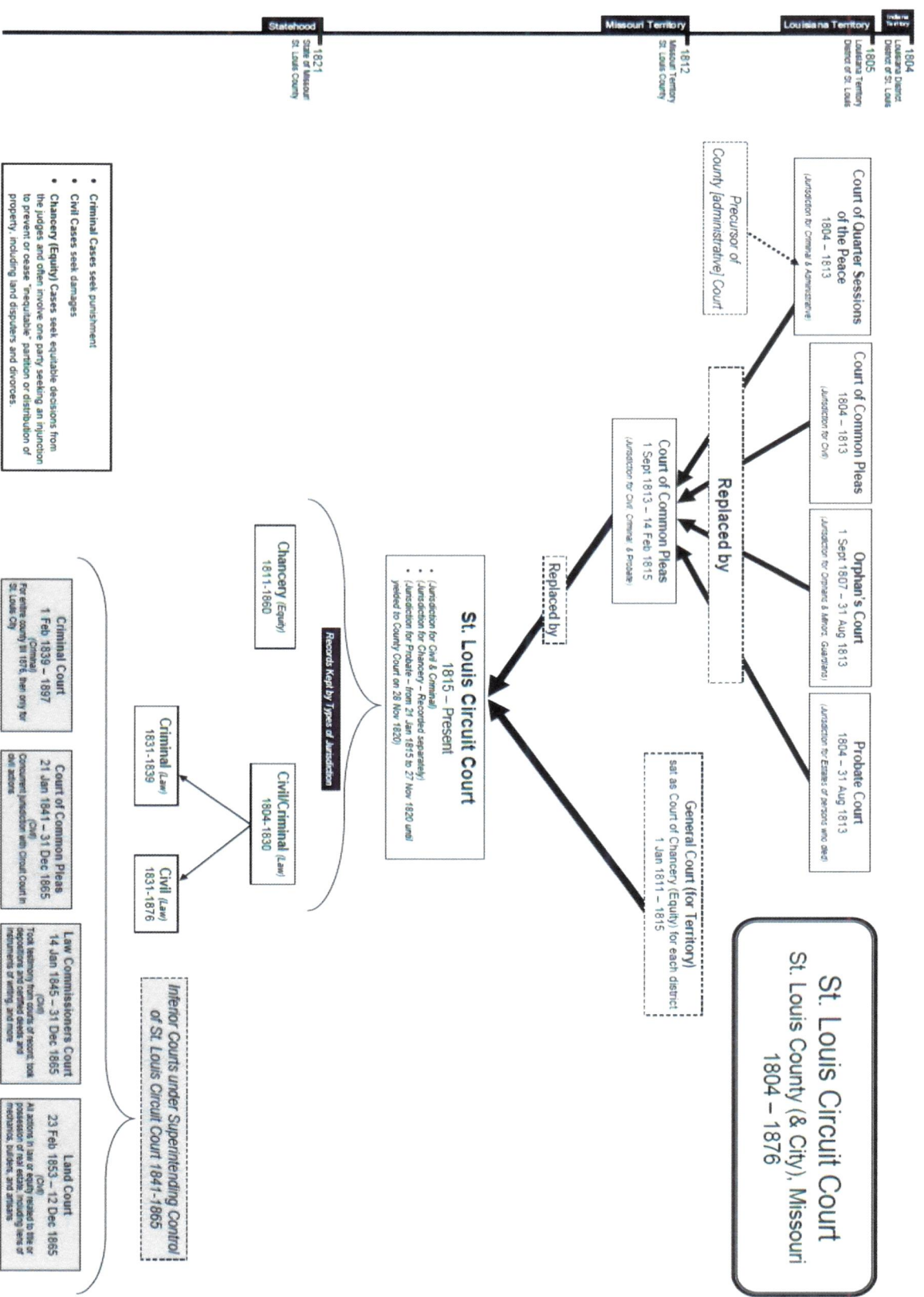
MICROFILM HOLDINGS (Other Records)

- Black Abolitionist Papers: 1813-1865, 17 reels
- Board of Aldermen, St. Louis: Minutes, 1830-1858; Ordinances, 1824-1877, 1988-1989, 19 reels
- City Directories, St. Louis: 1848-1852, 1866-1870, 3 reels
- Coroner's Inquests: 1830-1900, 40 reels; Coroner's Accounts, 1837-1876, 1 reel
- County Court: Record books and Minutes, 1804-1950, 84 reels
- Justices of the Peace: Commissions, 1825-1888, 3 reels; Dockets, 1848-1872, 2 reels
- Mayor's Messages, St. Louis: 1850-1901, 10 reels
- Missouri Gazette and Illinois Advertiser: 1808-1818, 2 reels
- Recorder of Deeds: Marriages, 1806-1920, 25 reels; Land Surveys, 1806-1851, 1 reel
- St. Charles Circuit Court: Case files, 1805-1835, 39 reels

REFERENCE COLLECTION

546 books comprising primary and secondary resource material for regional, state and local history, including reports of the St. Louis Court of Appeals and the Missouri Supreme Court.

Carnahan Courthouse, Room 245, 1114 Market St., St. Louis, MO 63101; 314-588-1746; bill.glankler@sos.mo.gov



In-house database Subject Series

Subject Series Name	Description/Notes	Content Examples	Combine with
African American	Do not pair with "Slave"; use for race-related not specifically slave	Free persons of color; black litigants	
Barge	Form of transportation		
Carriage	Form of transportation		
Church	Church building, religious group, or religious institution, or religious/spiritual practice		
Commerce	Commercial activity	Fur trade, mill, tavern, hotel, boarding house, quarry, rent, etc.	Trade, Labor, Services
Commodity	Resource or produce	Livestock, timber, coal, rock, specie (gold, silver, coins)	Merchandise, Personal Property
Crime	For crimes mentioned in divorce or other cases that are not criminal cases	Arson, larceny, etc.	
Debt	For cases, such as injunctions, in which "Debt" is not the action or the COA keyword		
Education	Information related to schools and education	Schools, school lands, textbooks, school district as litigant	
Election			
Entertainment	Information related to methods of entertainment and CULTURE	Musical instruments, musicians, piano, theater, circus, billiard table, etc.	Personal Property
Finance	For banking-related cases; NOT necessarily for cases with a bank as litigant	Capital stocks, investment, partnerships, starting a bank, etc.	
Freedom Suit	Petitions by slaves for freedom		
Insurance	Cases involving insurance policies		
International	Reference to trade or active relationship with other countries		
Labor	Types of non-specified or unskilled work	Deck hand, hod carrier, etc.	Services, Trade
Liquor	Mentions of intoxicating beverages	Beer, ale, whiskey, wine, brandy, saloon, tavern, barroom, bar supplies, etc.	Merchandise, Personal Property
Livestock	Any farm animals	Horse, cow, pig, etc.	
Machinery	Any type of machinery	Soda fountain, pump, engine	
Manufacturing	Any mention of manufacturing or manufacturers or factory		
Medical	Any medical, medicine, illness references	Medicine, medical care, hospital, disease, pharmacist, apothecary, drugs, etc.	

In-house database Subject Series

Merchandise	Products made and sold	Gun, picture frame, dry goods, etc.	Commodity, Personal Property
Military	Any mention of military rank or other things related to the military; use CIVIL WAR for specific references to Civil War persons or events		
Native American	Any mention of Native Americans		
Personal Property	For cases in which the COA keyword is not "personal property"; goods attached should be personal property, not commodity or merchandise	Furniture, household items, stock of goods attached	Commodity, Merchandise
Property	For cases in which the COA keyword is not "property"; real estate, locations for business or residence, other buildings		
Railroad	Actions involving railroad	Condemnation, negligence and injury, killing cattle	
Services	Services provided	Use of cart, horse, board and lodging, work on steamboat, steamboat passage, legal fees, livery, etc.	Trade, Labor
Slave	For those cases in which the COS is not "slave" but slaves are mentioned		
Steamboat	Any mention of steamboat		
Trade	Skilled trade or merchant	Tailor, printing, grocer, hatter, merchant, carpenter, painter, clerk, architect, building contractor, trade unions or benevolent associations, etc.	Services, Labor
Urban	Relating to urban development and change	Roads, buildings, special tax for street improvements, personal injury by streetcars or wagons or sidewalks, cities as litigants, police and other municipal institutions, Old Courthouse, marshal, charitable organizations, city cultural or entertainment institutions, tavern, hotel	Commerce
Wagon	Any mention of wagon		
Women	Any action involving women that is NOT a divorce	Breach of promise, female litigants or others involved in the case	Divorce, Marriage COA Keywords